



When the Sleepers Woke

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About Zagat:

Arthur Leo Zagat was an American lawyer and writer of pulp fiction and science fiction. Trained in the law, he gave it up to write professionally. Zagat is noted for his collaborations with fellow lawyer Nat Schachner. Zagat wrote about 500 stories that appeared in a variety of pulp magazines including Thrilling Wonder Stories, Argosy and Astounding. His novel, *Seven Out of Time*, was published by Fantasy Press in 1949.

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"Prepare for battle!" The command crackled in Allan Dane's helmet. "Enemy approaching from southeast! Squadron commanders execute plan two!" Allan settled back in the seat of his one-man helicopter, his broad frame rendered even bulkier by the leather suit that incased it. He was tensed, but quiescent. Action would be first joined sixty miles away, and his own squadron was in reserve.

Over New York and its bay the American air fleet was in motion. Suddenly movement ceased, and the formation froze. Ten flying forts were each the apex of a far-spread cone, axis horizontal, whose body was the fanned back-ranging of its squadron of a thousand helicopter planes. The cones bristled oceanward from the sea-margin of New York, their points a fifty-mile arc of defiance, their bases tangent to one another, almost touching the ground at their lower edges, then circling upward for ten thousand feet. From van to rear each formation was five miles in length.

Behind and above, the main body of the fleet sloped in echeloned ranks, hiding the threatened city with an impenetrable terraced wall of buzzing helios and massive forts. Up, back, up, back, the serried masses reached, till the rearmost were twenty-five thousand feet aloft. And farther behind, unmoving on their six-mile level, were the light 'copters of the reserve. Dane gazed down that tremendous vista to the far-off front line, and swore softly. Just his luck to be out of the scrap: the enemy would never penetrate to these northern out-skirts of New York.

"Men of the fleet!" General Huntington's voice sounded from his flagship, the *Washington*. Somehow its gruffness overrode the mechanical quality of the intra-fleet radio transmission. Almost it seemed he was there in the tiny cabin. "Reports have at this moment been received that our attack fleets have been everywhere successful. Our rocket ships have destroyed Tokyo, Addis Ababa, Odessa, Peiping and Cape Town, and are now ranging inland through enemy territory."

Even through the double leather of his helmet a roar came to Allan. He felt his craft vibrate to the exultant cheers of the fleet. His own mouth was open, and his throat rasping... .

"*But*"—the single syllable choked the surge of sound—"London, Paris, and Berlin have fallen to the enemy." The words thudded in the pilot's ear-phones. "San Francisco is being attacked. Communication with New Orleans has failed. The enemy are in sight of Buenos Aires—" The general broke off, and Allan sensed dully that there was other news, news that he dared not give the fleet.

The gruff voice changed. "Men of the fleet, New York is in our charge. The enemy is upon us, the battle is commencing. The issue is in your hands."

Pat on his last word, a dark cloud spread along the south-eastern horizon. From the spear-heads of the cone formations great green beams shot out across the sea. Orange flame flared in answer, all along the black bank that was the enemy fleet. Where the green beams struck the orange blinked out, and the blue of sky showed through. And the American ships were as yet untouched. A great shout rose to Allan's lips—that they had the range on the enemy, and the attack defeated before it was well begun.

But was it? Swift as the American rays scythed destruction along the enemy line, the gaps filled and lethal orange leaped out again. Now the black cloud was piling up, was rising till it was a towering curtain against the sky. On it came, like some monstrous tidal wave. Great rents were torn through it by the stabbing beams of the flying forts, holes where ships and men had been whiffed into dust by the hundred. But the attack came on.

Now all the great defensive cones burst into an emerald blaze as the smaller ships loosed their bolts. And from the terraced slope of the supporting fleet a hundred steel ovoids lumbered forward to meet the threat. All the vast space between the hosts, mountain-high from the sea's surface, was filled with dazzling light, now green, now orange, as the conflicting beams crossed and mingled. There were gaps in the advancing curtain that did not fill, but the defending cones were melting away, were disappearing, were gone.

"Flight ZLX prepare for action!" Dane's eyes flicked over the gages, checking in routine precaution. He started when he saw the V of the chronometer's hands. Only six minutes had passed since the battle's start—it seemed hours. And already the reserve was being called on! He was suddenly cold. Out there, over the bay, the enemy forces had ceased their advance. The American first line cones were gone—true enough, but the support fleet was still intact. Some new element had entered the battle, visible as yet only in the *Washington's* powerful television view-screens. The flight adjutant's voice again snapped a command:

"Direction vertical. Thirty thousand feet. Full speed. Go!"

Dane jerked home his throttle. The battle shot down, and his seat thrust up against him. Something hurtled past, blurred by the speed of

its descent. The plane rocked to a sudden detonation, and Allan fought to steady it. Then he had reached the commanded height. At sixty thousand feet the helio vanes were useless, only the power of the auxiliary rocket-tubes maintained his altitude.

"Formation B. Engage the enemy!" came the order.

They were just ahead, a dozen giant craft, torpedo-shaped and steel-incased, the scarlet fire of their gas blasts holding them poised steady in their fifty-mile-long line. From curious swellings that broke the clean lines of their under-bodies black spheres were dropping in steady streams. Allan knew then whence came the crash that had rocked his ship as she rose. These were bombs, huge bombs, charged with heaven alone knew what Earth-shaking explosive. They were catapulting down, an iron death hail, on the fleet and the city twelve miles below!

The enemy's strategy was clear. While his main fleet was engaging the American defense in a frontal attack, these huge rocket-bombers had looped unseen through the stratosphere to this point of vantage. The planes that had leaped to this new menace swept toward the bombers in three parallel lines, above, to right and left of them. Allan's plane leaping to position at the very end of one long line. The three leaders reached the first rocket-ship, and their green beams shot out. In that instant the enemy craft seemed to explode in intense blue light. Then the awful dazzle was gone. The rocket ship was there, just as before, but the American helio-planes were gone, were wiped out as though they had never been. The next trio, and the next, rushed up. Again and again came that flash of force, annihilating them. Superbly the tiny gnats that were the American planes plunged headlong at the hovering Leviathan of the air and were whiffed into nothingness. Sixty brave men were dancing motes of cosmic dust before the shocked commander could sound the recall.

The helicopter squadron curved away, still keeping its ordered lines, but orange flame leaped out from all twelve of the enemy vessels, orange flame that caught them, that ran along their ranks and sent them hurtling Earthward—blackened corpses in blazing coffins. "Abandon ships!" The adjutant's last order crisped, coldly metallic, soldierly as ever. In the next breath, as Allan reached for the lever that would open the trapdoor beneath him, he saw the command-ship plunge down, a flaring comet.

Above Allan Dane, the twenty-foot silk of his parachute bellied out in the denser air of the lower heights. His respirator tube was still in his

mouth, and the double, vacuum-interlined leather of his safety suit had kept him from freezing in the spatial cold of the stratosphere. He looked south.

All the proud thousands of the defense fleet were gone, blown to fragments by the time bombs from above. The city was hidden in a thick, muddy-yellow fog. "Queer," the thought ran through his brain, "that there should be fog in mid-afternoon, under a blazing sun." Then he saw them, the circling black ships of the enemy, trailing behind them long wakes of the drab yellow vapor that drifted heavily down to shroud New York with—gas!

Allan felt nauseated as he imagined a fleeting picture of the many-leveled city, of its mist-darkened streets with swarming myriads of slumped bodies clogging the conveyor belts that still moved because no hand was left to shut them off; of women and children, and aged or crippled men strewn in tortured, horrible attitudes in all the roof-parks, in their homes, in every nook and cranny of the murdered city. He looked beneath his drifting descent and saw roads that were rivers, alive with every manner of fleeing conveyance, and he groaned, knowing that in moments the pursuing ships would send down their lethal mist to put an end to that futile flight.

Sugar Loaf Mountain rose toward him. At its very summit was a clearing among the trees, and, incongruously motionless in that world where every one was rushing from inescapable death, a man stood calmly there, gazing up at him. Allan screamed down to him! "Run! You fool. Run or the gas will get you!"

Of course the man could not hear that cry, but one tiny arm rose and pointed south. Allan followed the direction of the gesture and saw a black plane veering toward him. Then orange flared from it, though it was distant, and a wave of intolerable heat enveloped him. Something cried within him: "Too far—he's too far off to kill me with his beam!" Then he knew no more.

From New York, from devastated San Francisco, from Rio, from Buenos Aires, from fifty other desolated points along the seaboard of the Americas, the black fleets swept along the coasts and inland, vomiting their yellow death till all the continents were blanketed with life-destroying gas. And in Europe and Australasia the destroying hordes, having smashed the proud defenses of the coastlines, engaged in the same pursuit, till in one short week all the lands of the Western Allies were

swept clear of life. Then the Eastern ships turned homeward, to wait until the vapor they had strewn had lost its virulence, and the teeming masses of the East might take possession of the half world the ebony-painted destroyers had conquered. The black fliers turned homeward, but there was no homeland left for them to seek!

For though the defense fleets of the Western Coalition had been everywhere beaten, their attack squadrons had been everywhere successful. All Asia and Africa lay under a pall of milky emerald gas as toxic, as blasting, as the Easterners' yellow.

And the Westerners were returning too!

In their televue screens the commanders of the black swarms, and of the white thousands, sought their home ports, and saw the world to be a haze-covered sphere where not even a fly could live. Then, as if by common accord, the white ships and the black sped across lifeless hemispheres to meet in mid-air over the long green swells of the Pacific. They met, and on the instant they were at each others' throats like two packs of wild dogs, killing, killing, killing till they themselves were killed. No quarter was asked in that fight, and none given. No hope of victory was there, nor fear of defeat. Better swift death in the high passion of combat, than slow, hopeless drifting over a dead world.

But there was one black ship that slunk out of that mass suicide of man's last remnant. Within its long hulk three motionless forms lay in a welter of blood that smeared their officers' badges, and a dozen gibbering men labored at the controls of their craft. The long black shadows came at last to veil an empty sky, and a sea whereon there was drifting wreckage but not one sign of any life. And as far to the north a shadowed airship sped athwart the moon, searching for one spot, one tiny patch of solid ground, that was free from the dread gas.

Consciousness came slowly back to Allan Dane. At first he was aware, merely, that he was alive. That was astonishing enough. Even if the orange beam had not killed him with its heat, the gas should have struck his leather suit. The Easterners could not be behind his own forces in their development of that terrible weapon.

Allan felt a coolness on his face, his hands, that could mean only that his helmet and gloves had been removed. He heard movement, and opened his eyes.

At first he could see only blueness, pale and lambent. He gazed dully up at a lustrous, glasslike substance that arched above him. The sound of some one moving came again, and Allan turned his head to it. His neck muscles seemed stiff, that simple motion drew tremendously on his strength.

About fifteen yards away, a man bent over a transparent, boxlike contrivance in which something fluttered. From this device a metal tube angled away into the wall. There was other apparatus on the long table at which the man was—

"At last! Clear at last!" a mellow, rounded voice exclaimed jubilantly.

"Clear? Are you sure, Anthony, are you sure?" This other voice, throbbing with vibrant repression as if its owner feared to believe longed-for tidings come at last, was a woman's. As the man half turned, its owner came between him and Allan. All he could see of them was that the one called Anthony was very tall, and thin, and the woman almost as tall, and that both wore hooded white robes, the woman's falling to her heels, the man's to his knees, waist-girdled with black cords.

"Look for yourself, Helen."

She bent over the transparent cage. "Oh Anthony, how wonderful!"

Allan attempted to rise. He was unutterably weak; to move a finger was a gigantic task, to do more impossible. He tried to call out. No sound came from his straining throat.

The couple straightened. The man spoke, too low for Dane to hear. Each took something from the table, something that gleamed metallically. Then they turned—and Allan saw what the white robes clothed!

Skulls leered at him from beneath the hoods—fleshless skulls; tinted a pale green! Jutting jawbones, cavernous cheeks, lipless mouths that grinned mirthlessly—his eyes froze to them and a scream formed within him that he could not utter. Hands appeared from within the flowing sleeves, and they were skeleton hands, each phalanx clearly marked. They moved, that was the worst of it, the hands moved; and deep in the shadowed eye-pits of the skulls blue light glowed in living eyes that peered at something to Allan's right.

His eyes followed the direction of their gaze. Ranged along the wall, and jutting out, he saw four couches. On each was a figure, shrouded and hooded in white. Utterly still they were—and the cadaverous countenances exposed between robe and hood betrayed not the slightest

twitch. The arms were crossed on each breast. Allan realized that his own arms were similarly crossed. He looked down at them, saw the white gleam of a robe that fell down his length in smooth, still folds, saw his hands—greenish skin stretched tight over fleshless bones. Suddenly it seemed to him that the air was musty and fetid.

Footsteps slithered across the floor. The woman-form bent over the farthest couch. With one skeleton hand she bared an arm of the corpse-like figure; the other hand lifted—metal glinted in it and plunged into the unshrinking limb! A slow movement of the bony fingers and the threadlike, silvery thing was withdrawn. She stared ghoulishly—and the man, too, gazed tensely at her victim. A long quiver ran through the recumbent shape, another. The death's-head on the pallet moved slightly—and merciful blackness welled up in Allan's brain... .

A cool liquid was in his mouth. He swallowed instinctively, and warmth ran through his veins. He felt strength flooding back into him—and he remembered horror.

"That's better," a mellow voice said, close above him. "Drink just a little more." The cool liquid came up against Allan's lips again, pungent, and he drank. Once more strength surged warmingly within him. "That's a good fellow. A little more now."

Fingers were on Allan's wrist, life-warm. There was friendliness in the voice that was speaking to him, and solicitude. He dared to look.

A skull-like head was right before him. But seen thus closely, the terror of it was lessened. Fleshless indeed it was. But a parchment skin was tightly drawn over the bones, and Allan could see that its true shade was a sere yellow. It was the bluish light that had given it the green of decay. The deep-sunk eyes were kindly; they gleamed with pleasure as Allan's opened; and the voice asked:

"How do you feel?"

Allan made shift to reply, though a strange lassitude still enervated him, and his mouth was full of tongue. "Much better, thank you. But who—who...?"

With a sudden access of energy Allan sat up on his couch. He looked about him, and his fears were back full flood.

He was in a chamber with neither door nor window—floor, walls, and arched ceiling entirely formed of the palely lustrous, glasslike substance. The room was perhaps twenty by forty feet, its ceiling curving to about

five yards from the floor at its highest point, and the spectral blue glow that filled it was apparently sourceless. It lit three vacant couches to his left. To his right were the four he had already seen. The woman was ministering to the occupants of these—living skeletons that lay flaccid, but whose heads were moving, barely moving from side to side. Like nothing else but a sepulcher the place seemed, a tomb in which the dead had come to life!

Allan clutched at Anthony's arm, grasped textured fabric that was cold to his frantic touch, and thin bone beneath. "In Heaven's name," he mouthed, "tell me what sort of place this is before—" He stopped, appalled by a sudden thought. Perhaps he was insane, this seeming tomb really some hospital ward transformed by his crazed brain. A wave of weakness overcame him, and he fell back.

"Careful," the other spoke soothingly, "you must give the plasma time to act or you may harm yourself."

If Allan shut out sight with his eyelids, and listened only to the resonance of Anthony's voice, he could hold his slipping grip on reason. He felt that the cloth of his robe was metal, fine spun and woven. That was strangely reassuring.

"How long do you think you have slept?"

"How long?" Dane murmured. Something told him that he had been unconscious for a long time. "A week?"

Anthony sighed. "No. Longer than that, much longer." There was reluctance in his tone. "You have lain here for twenty years."

Allan's eyes flew open, and he stared up into the speaker's face. Twenty years! Somehow it did not occur to him to disbelieve this astounding statement. He struggled hard to realize its implication. Two decades had passed since last he remembered. He had been a youth then. Now he was forty-four.

Anthony continued. "That may be a shock to you, but this will be a greater. Unless I am greatly mistaken, we seven, we four men and three women, are the only living humans left on Earth."

The words dripped into Allan's consciousness. Beyond them, he could hear movements, exclamations. But they meant nothing to him. Only the one thought tolled, knell-like, within him. "We seven are the only living humans left on Earth."

Dimly he knew that Anthony was talking. "There is a possibility, a bare possibility, that somewhere near here there are two others. That chance is faint indeed. Otherwise humanity is dead, killed by its own hand."

Through a dizzy vertigo that blurred sight and sound Allan heard the rounded voice go on and on, telling the story of the doom that Man's own folly had brought. And intermingled with that tale of a world gone mad there came back to the listener the clear-cut vision of the day of horror that to him seemed but yesterday. He remembered the sudden ultimatum of the Easterner's, the Western Coalition's stanch defiance. Again he saw a supposedly invincible fleet utterly destroyed, saw comrades whiffed out of existence in infinitesimal seconds. Again he watched a city of twenty millions inundated by a muddy yellow gas in which no human being, no animal, might live. He waked once more to find himself helpless with weakness, among living corpses, in a place that seemed a tomb.

"All this we saw in our long-distance televisoscope." Anthony gestured to a blank screen above the apparatus ranged along the opposite wall. "Then, just as that last weird battle ended, something happened to the eye-mast outside, and we were isolated." He fell silent, in a brooding reverie, and Allan, recovered somewhat, saw that the other strange occupants of the place had risen and were clustered about that cage where something fluttered.

He turned to his mentor. "But I still don't understand. How is it that we escaped the holocaust?"

"Four of us, members of the scientific faculty of the National University, having foreseen the inevitable result of the course of world events, had joined forces and developed a substance—we called it nullite—so dense and so inert that no gas could penetrate it or chemical break it down. We offered it to the Western General Staff, and were laughed at for our pains. Then we decided to use it to preserve our families from the danger we foresaw.

"At first we sheathed one room in each of our own dwellings with the nullite. Later we decided that the deposited gas might last for many years, and blasted out this cave, a hundred feet below the summit of Sugar Loaf Mountain, for a common refuge.

"When the red word flared from the newscast machines, 'War!', we fled here with our wives, as we had planned. All, that is, save one couple, the youngest of us. They never arrived—I waited for them in the

clearing at the entrance to the shaft. At the last moment I saw you dropping in your parachute, saw the death beam just miss you, saw you land at my feet, unconscious, but still breathing. I carried you in with me. There were two vacant spaces: you could occupy one of them. Then we sealed the last aperture with nullite, and settled to our vigil. We did not know how long the gas would last, but we had sufficient concentrated food, and enough air-making chemicals, to last two persons for a century."

"Two people," Allan interjected. "But there were seven here."

Anthony nodded. "We had worked out every detail of our plan. When release came we needs must be in the full vigor of our prime. From our loins must spring the new race that will repopulate the Earth; that will found a new civilization, better, we hope, and wiser than the one that had died. By injecting a certain compound we suspended animation in all but a single couple. Those so treated were to all intents dead, though their bodies did not decay. The two who remained awake kept watch, making daily tests of the outside atmosphere, drawn through tubes of nullite that pierced the seal. At the end of six months they revived another couple by the use of a second injection, and were themselves put to sleep. We exempted you from the watch, since you could have no companion, so that while we have lived about seven years in the twenty, you have not aged at all."

"Not aged at all!" Dane exclaimed. "Why, I have wasted away to a mere bagful of bones, and you others also."

The other smiled wistfully. "Even though life was the merest thread there was still an infinitely slow using of bodily tissue. But the drink we partook of as we awoke is a plasma that will very quickly restore the lost body elements. In an hour we shall all have been rejuvenated. You will be again the age you were on that fateful day in 2163, and the rest of us but seven years older. Look!" He moved aside, so that Allen could see the others, who had gathered around his couch. They were a curious semicircle of gaunt figures, but he could see that they had subtly changed. Still emaciated beyond description, they were no longer simulacra of death. The contours of their faces were rounding, were filling out, and the faintest tinge of pink was creeping into the yellow of their skins.

"Anthony, isn't it time that we opened the seals and went outside? Haven't we been long enough in this prison?" It was a short man who

spoke, his voice impatient, and there was an eager murmur from the others.

"I am as anxious as you." Anthony's slow words were dubious. "But it may still be dangerous. The gas may have cleared away only from our immediate vicinity. In hollows, or places where the air is stagnant, it may still be toxic. It is my opinion that only one should go at first, to investigate."

A babble of volunteering cries burst out, but Dane's voice cut through the others. "Look here," the sentence tumbled from his lips. "I'm an extra here. It doesn't matter whether I live or die—I have no special knowledge. I cannot even father a family, since I have no wife. I am the only one to go out as long as there is danger."

"The young man is right," some one said. "He is the logical choice."

"Very well," agreed Anthony, who appeared the leader. "He shall be the first."

His instructions were few. One plane had been preserved, and was in the shaft. Allan was to make a circuit of the neighborhood. If he deemed it safe he was to visit the building, described to him, where the fourth couple had lived, and see if he could find trace of them. Then he was to return and report his findings.

All stuffed their ears with cotton wool, and crowded against one end of the chamber. Anthony had the end of a long double wire in his hand, and it curled across the floor to the farther wall. He pressed the button of a pear-switch—and there was a concussion that hurled the watchers against the wall behind them. A great gap appeared in the farther wall, beyond it a black chasm, and a helicopter that was dimly illumined by the light from within the room. A quick inspection of the flier revealed that its alumino-steeloid had been unaffected by the passage of time, and Allan climbed into it. A wave of his hand simulated an insouciance he did not feel. Then he was rising through darkness. The sun's light struck down and enveloped him, and he was in the open air. He rose above the trees.

Desolation spread out beneath him. In all the vastness that unfolded as the lone 'copter climbed into a clear sky, nothing moved. The air, that from babyhood Allan had seen crowded with bustling traffic, was a ghastly emptiness. Not even a tiny, wheeling speck betrayed the presence of a bird. And below—the gas that was fatal to animal life seemed

to have stimulated vegetable growth—an illimitable sea of green rolled untenanted to where the first ramparts of New York rose against the sky. Roads, monorail lines, all the countless tracks of civilization had disappeared beneath the green tide. Nature had taken back its own.

Heartsick, he turned south, and followed the silver stream of the Hudson. The river, lonely as the sky, seemed to drift oily and sluggish down to plunge beneath the city at the lower end of the Tappan Zee. Allan Dane came over New York, gazed down at the ruin of its soaring towers, at the leaping arabesque of its street bridges. He peered into vast rifts of tumbled, chaotic concrete and steel. Nothing moved in all that spreading wonder that had housed twenty millions of people.

Allan drifted lower, and saw that from what had been garden roof-parks, now a welter of strewn earth, the green things had spread till they covered the heaped jetsam with a healing blanket of foliage. Not all the city had been laid waste, however. Here and there, great expanses of the cliff-like structures still stood, undamaged, and in the midst of one of these areas he saw the high-piled edifice to which he had been directed. Its roof was lush with vegetation but by dextrous handling he set his helicopter down upon it.

The engine roar diminished and died. Silence folded around him, a black, thick blanket.

Dane got heavily from his seat, oppressed by the vast soundlessness, and pushed through curling plants that caught at his heels. The sound of his passage was like crackling thunder. A decaying door was marked, in faded, almost undecipherable letters, "Emergency Stairs." It was half open, and Allan squeezed around its edge. Spiral steps curved down into blackness. He hesitated a moment. He could *feel* the awful silence, the emptiness below was a pit of death. Anthony's words came back to him, echoed in his ears: "We seven are the only living humans left on Earth."

In that moment, out of the pitch-black well of soundlessness, a scream shrilled! No words, only a red, thin thread of sound, rising, and falling, and rising again out of depths where not even a living mouse should be! It came again, ripping the silence—a woman's scream, high-pitched, quivering with fear!

Allan plunged down into the darkness, caroming from wall to wall as he half ran, half fell, down the twisting stairs. Another sound reverberated from unseen walls, and Dane realized that it was his own voice, shouting.

His feet struck level floor. A pale rectangle of light showed before him, and he dived through it. He was in a corridor, dim-lit by phosphorescent fungi that cloaked the damp walls. He halted, at fault. The long hall stretched away to either side, cluttered with grimed bones, slimy with mold. By the age-blistered name cards on closed doors he knew himself to be on a residential level. But which way should he turn? Whence had come that scream? He crouched against the wall, his heartbeats thudding loud in his ears, and listened for a clue.

A muffled sound of scuffling came from his left. Allan whirled toward it and sped down the corridor. He was breathing in great gasps, and the air he breathed was thick and musty. Too late to stop, he saw a slick of green slime on the floor. His foot struck it, flew out from under him, he fell and slid headlong.

Something stopped him, something that crunched sickeningly as his sliding body crashed into it: two skeleton forms, clasped in each others' arms, moldering fabric hanging in rags from them. They lay across the threshold of a door, and just within Dane heard snarls, snufflings, bestial growls, the sounds of a struggle. Something thumped against the door and fell away. He heaved to his feet and his hand found the doorknob. But suddenly he was powerless to turn it. Panic tugged at him with almost palpable fingers, drove him to go back to his plane and safety. Almost he fled—but he remembered in time that it was a *human* scream he had heard.

The portal gave easily to his lunge. Bluish light flooded the chamber, dazzling after the fungous dimness. A bulking form, whether ape or man he could not make out, so brutish the face, so hairy the dark body revealed by its tattered rags bent over the sprawled shape of a girl. Dane saw her in a fleeting glimpse—the slim length of her, the tumbled, golden hair half hiding, half revealing white curves of beauty, a shoulder from which the tunic had been torn away. Then her attacker whirled toward the intruder. Allan leaped from the threshold, his fist arcing before him. The blow landed flush on the other's jaw.

Yellow, rotted fangs showed in a jet-black face, and the huge Negro lunged for Dane, roaring his rage. Before the American could dodge or strike again the other's long arms were around him. Allan was jerked against a barrel chest, felt his bones cracking in a terrific hug. Eyes, tiny and red, stared into his. Dane drove knees and fists into the Negro, but the awful pressure of those simian arms across his back increased till he

could no longer breathe. The American was almost gone, the black face blurred, and the continuous snarling of the brute was dull in his ears.

Suddenly Dane went limp. Victory flashed into the red eyes. The squeezing arms relaxed, and in that moment Allan's legs curled around the black's, heels jerking into the hollows behind his captor's knees. At the same instant, levering from that heel hold, Dane butted sharply up against the rocky jaw. All the strength that was left in him went into that trick, and it worked! The Negro crashed backward to the floor. Allan twisted, and rolled free. He was up, looking desperately around for some weapon. But it was not needed; the hulk on the floor never moved. The back of the Negro's head had smashed against the floor, and he was out.

Dane turned and bent to the girl. She, too, was motionless, but to his relief her breast rose and fell steadily. He glanced about looking for water to revive her. Then he saw that this room was sheathed with nullite. Then this was one of the chambers prepared before the plans were changed. But the girl could not be of the fourth couple—the missing two that had never appeared. She was no more than eighteen. And whence had come the giant black who had attacked her?

"Stick up your hands. Quick!"

Allan whirled to the sudden challenge. The man in the doorway was pointing a ray-gun steadily at him! Dane's hands went up, and he gasped inanely: "Who are you?"

"What is going on here? Where did you come from?" The newcomer's English was precise, too precise. No hulking brute, this. A yellow man, slitted eyes slanted and malevolent; broad, flat nose above thin lips that were purple against the saffron skin. The uniform he wore showed signs of some attempt to keep it in repair, and to its threadbare collar still clung a tarnished insignia: the seven-pointed star, emblem of the enemy Allan had fought on a yesterday that was two decades gone.

"Well? Have you lost the power of speech?" The ray-gun jerked forward impatiently.

An obscure impulse prompted Allan's reply. "Almost. I've spoken to no one for twenty years."

"So-o,"—softly. The Oriental's eyes flicked past Dane, and a sudden light glowed in them. "You have been alone for twenty years in this city we thought was empty, but you were on hand to fight with Ra-Jamba for

this delightful creature." Something leered from his face that sent the hot blood surging to Allan's temples. The Easterner stepped catlike into the room, shutting the door behind him with his free hand.

"That is true," the American said, with what calmness he could muster. Through the dizzy whirl of his mind he clung to one thought: he must conceal the existence of the little group on Sugar Loaf Mountain at all costs. "I had just discovered that it was safe to leave the room, similar to this, in which I had hidden from the gas, when I heard a scream. I reached here just in time to—"

"To interfere with Ra-Jamba's pleasure, and save the little white dove—for me. My thanks." The yellow man bowed mockingly. "Too bad," he purred, "that you should be robbed of the spoils of your fight." Then he asked irrelevantly. "So some of you Americans found a way to cheat our gas. How many?"

Allan temporized. There had been several similar refuges prepared, he said, but he did not know whether they had been used. This was the first he had visited beside his own. But how was it that the questioner knew so little about what had happened here? Had his people simply laid this country waste and never revisited it?

The Oriental shrugged. "My people are gone, wiped out by your gas as yours were wiped out by ours." He retold Anthony's story. "The crew of my own ship mutinied," he concluded. "We fled north, from that last terrible fight, north, ever north, till at the top of the world we found a little space that was not gas-covered. There was nothing there, just the ice, and the snow, and the cold. We lived there, twelve of us, all men. There were a few bears and seals. We slew them for food—and we grew a little mad. We were men—all men—do you understand?"

As he said this last, his thin voice rose to a shriek, and his eyes darted to the girl's recumbent form. At length, he went on, the gas began to retreat, and they followed it down. They had searched town after town, city after city, had found food in plenty, and all the trappings of civilization. But there was never a living being. And the fever in their blood drove them on.

That very morning the insane search had reached New York. They had landed on the roof of this very building. "We separated to hunt—and Ra-Jamba was the lucky one. But I—Jung Sin—am still luckier." He crept nearer to Allan, and tapped him on the chest with his weapon. "For look you—while those fools used all their ray-gun charges, even the charge of

the big tube on our ship, to kill food, I husbanded mine." He laughed shrilly. "So you see, I have the only ray-gun in the world. It shall make me master of the Earth." Again he laughed wildly.

"Now I'm going to kill you." The black cylinder leveled, and Dane stared at death. Alone, he would almost have welcomed it, but the thought of the girl in the filthy power of this beast seared through him. Jung Sin, the little red worms of madness crawling in his brain, paused for a final taunt.

"Let the thought of the white dove in my arms cons—" Allan's sandaled foot shot out into the man's stomach. In the same movement his hands came down, one snatched at and caught the ray-gun, the other smashed into the yellow face. Jung Sin lifted to the drive of fist and foot, crashed into the wall, fell to its foot. From the crumpled heap rose a shriek, a long piercing wail that ended in a gurgle.

Dane froze, the captured cylinder in his hand, and listened. There were others of the unholy band about. Had they heard? Dim sounds came to him. He leaped to the door, flung it open. Faint footfalls, a distant shout, came from far down the corridor, away from the direction of the stairs. Allan glimpsed dark forms, rushing toward him. He darted back to the girl, swung her, still unconscious, to his shoulder, and was out. The floor was slippery beneath his feet. He reeled as he ran, and the sounds of pursuit gained on him. The heavy burden weighed him down, the dim hallway stretched endlessly before him. From close behind came hoarse, guttural shouts that chilled him.

The pack was not twenty feet away when Allan reached the stair door. He slammed it behind him, heard the latch click. He mounted the narrow, winding steps with the last dregs of energy draining from him, and heard a crash below that told of the collapse of the barrier. But he had reached his plane, had flung the girl into it, and was pulling himself in when the first of the pursuers burst out on the roof.

Allan thrust home the throttle, the helio-vanes whined, and his 'copter leaped skyward. He glimpsed men running across the roof; they vanished behind a leafy arbor. Dane turned the nose of his craft toward Sugar Loaf, amethyst in the haze of distance, but from that green arch a black aircraft zoomed up and shot after him. The American shook his head free of the cobwebs of fatigue, and veered westward. He must not lead the Easterners to Anthony's refuge.

Through the dead air, over a dead world they shot—Allan's white flier and the ebony plane with the bloody emblem of the seven-pointed star emblazoned on its nose. Allan wheeled again as the pursuers reached his level on a long, climbing slant.

But they continued rising! They, were five hundred, a thousand feet above him. Then they leveled out, and dived down. Their strategy flashed on him—they were planning to shepherd Dane down, to force him to land where they would have him at their mercy. And their craft was the faster!

The black ship was right on his tail; Allan flicked his controls and his 'copter slid sideways on one wing. The other plane banked in a tight arc and sped for him; Dane countered with a lightning loop that brought him behind his enemy. His gray eyes were steel-hard, his lips were a straight, thin gash. The other ship was faster, but his, lighter and smaller, was more flexible. He could not get away, but—They flipped up and back in an inside loop; Allan's little craft barrel-rolled from under.

This sort of thing could not last forever. With each maneuver he was losing altitude. Serrated roof-tops were already a scant fifteen hundred feet beneath him, gaunt gray fingers that reached up to pluck him from the sky.

Only half Allan's mind was concentrated on the aerial acrobatics. The other half plodded a weary treadmill. In the nullite chamber beneath Sugar Loaf's summit, he thought, were three couples whose knowledge and wisdom had preserved them for the re peopling of the Earth. Their children, and their children's children—starting from such a source what heights might not the new race attain?

On the other hand, the ship that pursued him carried cowards who had failed in mankind's supreme test; men who had lost their manhood, ravening demi-beasts, half mad with loneliness and desire. As long as they remained alive they would be a menace to those others, an unclean band that would forever sully the new world with the old world's evils. Even should Allan himself escape them by some trick of fortune, they must inevitably find the little band of men—and women. A cold chill ran through Dane as he visioned the result.

He was not afraid to die. And the girl in the cabin behind him—better that she never awake than that she be the sport of Ra-Jamba's kind. A grim resolve formed itself, and he watched for a chance to put it into execution.

It came. At the end of a shifting maneuver the black 'copter was above and behind the white. Dane's fingers played swiftly over the control board. His ship flipped over backward, rolling on its long axis as it somersaulted. It was directly beneath the other. Then the helio-vanes screamed, and the American plane surged straight up!

A resounding crash split the air. Metal ripped, a fuel tank exploded. A black wing scaled earthward, zigzagging oddly. Dane's craft and the Eastern ship clung in an embrace of death. They started to drop. But, queerly, the black plane fell faster, left the white one behind as its descent gained speed till it splashed against concrete below. The American helicopter was dropping, too, but sluggishly. Something was buoying it up. Allan, momentarily struggling out of the welter of blackness and pain into which the concussion had thrown him, heard a familiar whine. His helio-vanes were still twirling, limply, stutteringly, bent and twisted, but gripping the air sufficiently to brake his crushed plane's fall.

Afterwards, Allan figured it out. The black pilot had slipped sidewise in that last frantic moment. His effort to escape had been futile, but instead of his ship's body, Dane's plane had struck the wing and torn it off. The impact had irreparably damaged the American craft, but the helicopter motor and vanes had somehow continued to function—just enough. The stanch alumino-steeloid fuselage, though bent and disfigured, had fended the full force of the crash from Allan and his passenger.

Just now, however, Allan Dane was doing no figuring. Pain welled behind his eyes, his left arm was limp, and a broken stanchion jammed his feet so they couldn't move. The vane motor stuttered and stopped, the plane floor dropped away from beneath him, then thudded against something. The jar jolted Allan into a gray land where there was nothing....

Someone was talking. He couldn't make out the words, but the sound was pleasant. It soothed the throb, throb in his head. Gosh, that had been some party last night, celebrating Flight ZLX's first prize in maneuvers! Great bunch, but would they be as good in real war—sure to come soon? Dane's stuff had too much kick; he must have passed out early.

Somebody shaking him.

"Lea' me 'lone; wanna sleep."

"Oh, wake up, please wake up."

Girl's voice. Nice voice. Voice like that should have pretty face. Better not look, though; too bad if she had buck teeth or squint eyes.

"Oh, what will I do? You're not dead? Please, you're not dead?"

"Don't think so. Head hurts too much." Allan opened his eyes. "Wrong again. Mus' be dead. Only angel could look like that. Not in right place, though. Mistake in shipping directions—tags switched or something."

A cold hand lay across his brow, and he felt it quiver. "Don't talk like that. Wake up." There was hysteria in the limpid tones.

Allan's brain mists cleared, and he grinned wryly. "I remember now. You all right?"

"Yes. But who are you? Are you Anthony Starr?"

"No. But Anthony sent me." Allan struggled to rise. He saw twisted wreckage beside him. He gasped. "I seem to be a bit conked. But what—what do you know about Anthony?"

The girl fumbled in her garments, brought out a paper. Allan found that he could move his right arm without much pain. He took the yellowed sheet, and read the faded writing.

Dear Naomi:

You are asleep, and we have been standing by your couch, drinking in the dear sight of you. You sleep soundly, tired as you are by the long-promised story we told you on this, your sixteenth birthday, the tale of how the world you know only from our teachings was destroyed, of how we planned with our friends to escape the general fate, of how an accident separated us from them and immured us here alone, of how you were born in this room and why you have lived here all your short life. We told you all that, but there is one thing we did not tell you.

Our food supply has run low, and the gas outside shows no signs of abatement. With careful husbanding we could all three live for another four months, but there is no prospect that we shall be released in so short a time. Alone, you will have sufficient for a year. If we had had some of Carl Thorman's life-suspension serum—but it was his perfection of that which caused the change of plan to a common refuge, and we never thought to stock with it the discarded rooms in our own apartments.

We have talked it over, and have decided that you must have that eight months' extra chance. And so, dear daughter, this must be farewell.

When the gas is gone Anthony will come to seek us, if he still lives. You will know him by the white robe of metal fabric he will wear, with its black girdle. Trust yourself to him; he was our friend. If all the food has been consumed, and he still has not come, open the door. But fate will not be so cruel to you.

We are weary of the long waiting, Naomi. Do not grieve for us. We shall go out into the gas hand in hand, and release will be welcome.

God guard you.

Allan was deeply moved by the love and sacrifice so simply worded. He looked at the girl, and had to blink away a mist that hazed his sight before he could see her. "I see," he said. "When the year ended and Anthony had not come, you opened the door—"

"And the gas was gone. Then I heard someone moving far down the corridor. I was so happy. Who could it be but Anthony? I called. A hairy, black giant came running, bellowing in some strange language. I was terribly frightened: I think I screamed, and tried to shut the door. But he was too quick for me: he was in the room, and his filthy paws reached out for me. I screamed again, dodged away from him. He pursued me. I threw myself backward, tripped, and fell. My head crashed against the floor.

"The next thing I knew I was here, and you were twisted and jammed there in front of me. At first I wanted to run, then I saw your robe. I dragged you out. Then I spied that other pile of wreckage, and I thought you too were dead... ." She covered her face with her hands.

Allan turned his head, saw for the first time the crumpled debris of the black ship, a hundred feet away, saw stark forms. "There's nothing to be afraid of now," he said. "It's all over. We'll soon be with your father's friend, with Anthony."

A little smile of reassurance trembled on the girl's lips. "Oh, do you think so?"

Allan nodded.

"Sure thing! Just trust to me, Miss ... ?"

"Call me Naomi."

"I'm Allan." The pilot thrust out his big hand, full fleshed now, and a little white one fluttered into it. An electric thrill rippled at the contact, and the two hands clung. The girl gave a little gasp, and pink flushed her cheeks.

Naomi shivered a little, and Allan realized that a chill breeze was sweeping across the roof-tops and that daylight was almost gone. "Look here, partner, we'd better get started, somewhere." He pulled himself to his feet. Pain shot through him and his head still throbbed. "I'd better take a look at that." He gestured to the wreck of the Eastern ship. "You wait here."

When he returned his face was pallid, and there was a sick look in his eyes. The girl asked sharply: "What is it? What's wrong? Tell me, Allan!"

He looked at her grimly, started to say something, thought better of it. Then: "It wasn't a pleasant sight." He shrugged. "Come on, let's see what we can find. We'll have to spend the night here, and start for Sugar Loaf Mountain in the morning."

Once more Allan descended a narrow, spiral staircase into darkness and silence. But this time someone was at his side, and a warmth ran through him at the thought.

The topmost floor of this building was a residential level. Like the one where he had found Naomi, a green mold covered everything, and pallid fungi, emitting a pale-green phosphorescence, clung to the walls and ceiling of the long corridor. Apparently the dwellers here had rushed out at the first alarm, had died elsewhere. "This is luck," Allan said. "We shall have a comfortable place to sleep, and food is not far away."

"How is that?"

"Why, the stores level is not far below. Most of New York's structures have a number of residential levels at the top, then a floor of retail stores, and below that amusement places, offices, and factories."

"But whatever food there was must be decayed by this time."

"The fresh food, yes. But there was a lot of canned stuff, and that is probably all right." He pushed open a door. In the eery light a well-furnished living room was revealed. "You wait here, and I'll see what I can rustle up."

"But I want to go with you."

Allan was inflexible. "Please do as I say. I have my reasons."

The girl turned away. "Oh, very well," she said flatly, "if you don't want me with you."

"That's a good scout. I'll be back just as quickly as I can. And, by the way, lock the door from the inside, and don't open it till you hear my voice."

The girl looked at him wonderingly. "But—" she began.

"Don't ask me why. Do it." There was a curious note in Allan's voice, one that cut off Naomi's question. The door shut, and Dane heard the bolt shoot home.

He stood in the corridor, listening intently, his face strained. There was no sound save that of Naomi's movements behind the locked door. Allan turned to search for the auxiliary staircase that must be somewhere near the bank of ascendor doors.

Silence was again around him, almost tangible in its heaviness. His footsteps reverberated through dead halls, the echo curiously muffled by the coating of slime that spread dankly green. Allan found the staircase well, descended cautiously, pausing often to listen. Not even the faint scuttering of vermin rewarded him.

At last, three stories down, he reached the stores level. Here, in a great open hall, were the numerous alcoved recesses of the shops. Once thronged, and gaudy with the varicolored goods brought by plane and heavy-bellied rocket-freighter from both hemispheres, the vast space was a desert of moldering dust heaps, brooding. There was a faint odor in the stagnant air—of spices, and rustling silks, of rare perfumes, of all the luxury of the Golden Age that Man's folly had ended.

Allan searched the long shelves feverishly, a nervous urge to complete his task and get back to Naomi tingling in his veins. Once he stopped suddenly, his body twisting to the stair landing. He seemed to have heard something, an indefinable thudding, the shadow of a sound. But it did not come again, and he dismissed it as the thumping of his own blood in his ears, audible in that stillness.

At the end of a long aisle, neat rows of cans greeted him, the labels rotted off, the metal rust-streaked, but apparently tight and whole. He found a metal basket, a roll of wire, twisted a handle for the basket and filled it, choosing the cans by their shape. He should have liked to

explore further, but the urge to return tugged at him. He went up the stairs three at a time.

There was a dark, oblong break in the long glowing wall of the upper corridor! The door—it was the door of the apartment where he had left Naomi! He leaped down the hall, shouting. The portal hung open, shattered: the rooms were stark, staring empty. Allan reeled out again. There were the marks of footprints, of many footprints, in the green scum of the hall floor, their own among them, that had led the marauders straight to the girl!

Fool that he had been! He had thought she would be safer behind a bolted door! Allan berated himself. He had thought not to worry her. There had been only four bodies in the wreckage of the black plane—but how had the rest gotten here so soon?

There was a humming whine from above. Dane hurtled toward the roof stairs. He burst from the upper landing, fists clenched, face a furious mask. A helicopter was just rising. Allan jumped for it, his fingers caught and clung to the undercarriage. But the down-swing of his body broke his hold, and Dane crashed to the roof.

He watched the plane, saw it zoom up, turn east, saw it sink and land a half mile away, atop the building where he had found her. In the moonlight he marked the direction of the place, its distance. Then he was descending stairs, innumerable stairs. He could not hope to reach it in time to save Naomi. But—his eyes grew stony—he could avenge her.

Afterwards that nightmare journey through the murdered city was a detailless blur to Allan. He clambered over heaped rubble, forced himself through windrows of piled bones that crumbled to dust at his touch. Vines, and whipping creepers of triumphant vegetation everywhere halted him; he tore them away with bleeding hands and stumbled on. He fell, and scrambled up again, and plodded on the interminable path till he had reached his goal.

Here, at last, some modicum of reason penetrated into the numbed blankness of his brain. The dark arch of the entrance-way was somehow familiar. Still legible under the verdigris of the bronze plate on the lintel he read, "Transportation Substation—District L2ZX." Now he understood why he had not seen the black flier till it had leaped in pursuit: how it was that Naomi's captors had so quickly found another 'copter. A broad well penetrated the center of this building—its opening must be covered by the luxuriant vines so that he had not noted it—and dropped

down to the midsection that was a hangar for local and private planes. His own little Zenith had been stored here on occasion. There must be other helicopters there, and a stock of fuel. A dim plan began to form at the back of his head.

But first he must find where they were, and what had happened to Naomi.

Allan removed his sandals, and began the endless climb. He made no sound on the steps, cushioned as they were with mold, but at each landing he paused for a moment, listening. The cold fire that burned within him left no room for fatigue, for pain.

A murmuring, then a laugh, cut through the deathlike stillness. Allan was nearly to the top. Down the corridor into which he crept, snakelike on his belly, red light flickered from an open door.

Dane moved soundlessly to that door, and, lying flat, pushed his head slowly past the sash till he could see within. By the light of a fire that danced in the center of the unburnable mallite floor, its illumination half revealing their sodden, brutish faces, he saw an unspeakably strange group. A scene from out of the dawn of history it was, the haunch-squatted circle, their yellow skins and black glistening in the crimson, shifting glow. He recognized the giant Negro, Ra-Jamba, his head bound with a rag, and Jung Sin. There were five others clustered about those two, and a third, a skew-eyed Oriental, intent on some game they were playing with little sticks that passed from hand to hand.

Before each of the players there was a little pile of fish bones, black with much handling. The Negro's pile, and that of Jung Sin, were about equal, but there were only two or three in front of the third player. And just as Allan caught sight of them, the sticks clicked, and a shrill objurgation burst from that third as the last of his markers were raked in by Jung Sin's taloned hand. The circle hunched closer, there was a ribald, taunting laugh from Ra-Jamba and Jung Sin glanced over his shoulder into a shadowed corner.

"Have patience, my lotus flower," he purred. "Only one is left. Soon the goddess of fortune and love will clear him from my path. By the nine-headed Dragon, I have never seen a game of Li-Fan last so long. But it draws to an end. Then we shall have our joy together, you and I."

In that instant the fire flared. Allan saw an open window in the background, and beneath it a slim white form lying, bound and helpless.

Fierce joy leaped in him, and fiercer hate, Naomi was as yet untouched, the game was being played for her as stake. He had come in time to save her!

But how? There were eight of the Easterners in the room. He had his ray-gun, and might cow them with it and free the girl. But as soon as he had gotten her out of the room, they would surge out after the whites. He could fight for a while, but the end was inevitable. And even if by some miracle he and Naomi escaped, they would be tracked to Sugar Loaf.

The sticks were clicking in a continuous rattle as the final bout of the game waxed fast and furious. And as fast and furious was the whirl of Allan's thoughts. He strove to remember the layout of this building. The helicopter hangar was next above this level. Outside the windows of this floor a narrow ledge ran. The nebulous scheme that had entered his dazed brain as he read the bronze plate below took clearer form, shaped itself to meet this new need.

Allan crept away to safe distance, leaped to his feet and flitted upward. He was in the empty, echoing space of the hangar level. The fuel tanks bulged huge in the dimness. Here were reels of the feed hose he needed—flexible metal that had withstood the years; here a faucet nozzle, and a long coil of fine wire. Haste driving him, he made the connections. Then he was descending again, dragging behind him a long black snake of hose whose other end was clamped to a vat of oxygen impregnated gasoline.

The rustle of the hose along the hall floor was muffled by the greasy slime. Dane got the nozzle to just outside the door of the room where Naomi lay captive. The rattle of the playing sticks still continued. Jung Sin's voice sounded, in a language that Allan did not understand. But there was no mistaking the triumphant note in the silky, jeering tones. The yellow man was winning, and winning fast.

Dane twisted one end of the wire around the faucet handle. Then he was unwinding the coil as he tried the door of the chamber next to the one where the fire burned, found it open, darted across the room and softly raised the sash. The sill here, like the one beneath which Naomi lay, was a bare two feet above the ground.

He was out on the ledge, sliding along it toward the fire-reddened oblong five feet away. He crammed his body close against the wall, kept his eyes away from the unfenced edge of that eighteen-inch shelf. Beyond,

an abyss waited, twelve thousand feet of nothingness down which a single misstep, an instant's vertigo, would send him hurtling. Suddenly the rattle of sticks stopped, and he heard the black's long howl of disappointed rage. The game was over!

Allan reached the window, glimpsed a leering semicircle of animal faces, saw Jung Sin coming toward him. Then he had swung in.

"Back, Jung Sin! Back!" Allan was straddled over Naomi's form, the ray-gun thrust out before his tense threat, his face livid, his eyes blazing. "Get back, or I ray you!"

Consternation, awe, flashed into the brutal faces of the Easterners. Jung Sin reeled back, his saffron hands rising. Allan's weapon swept slowly along the line of staring men. "If one of you moves I flash."

He bent to the girl, keeping his eyes on the Easterners, and his weapon steady. He had hung the wire coil over his shoulder, leaving his left hand free to fumble for and untie the cords around Naomi's wrists. He got them loose.

"Can you get your feet free, Naomi?"

"Yes, I can manage it." Her voice was steady, but there was a great thankfulness vibrant in it.

"Then do it and get out on the ledge. Quick." He straightened, and the blaze of his eyes held the yellow men, and the black, motionless.

Naomi, at the window behind him, gasped. "I know it looks tough," he encouraged her, "but you can make it. Don't look down. Go to the left. *And keep clear of that wire.*"

"I'm all right, Allan. But you—"

"Never mind about me. Go ahead."

Jung Sin jerked forward, driven by the madness that twisted his face into gargoye hideousness. But Allan's ray-gun stabbed at him, and he halted.

"I'm out, Allan."

Dane's foot felt back of him for the sill, found it. He lifted, facing his enemies inexorably, caught the lintel with his left hand, and was crouching outside. A sidewise flick of his eyes showed Naomi just reaching the other window.

He pulled at the wire till it was gently taut. A moment's compunction rose in him at what he was about to do. Then the black roll of the

Easterners' crimes rushed into his mind. Naomi's safety, his own, and that of the little colony that had endured so much to preserve humanity, cried out for their extinction. Allan jerked the metal thread, and the faucet nozzle in the corridor opened.

A black stream gushed forward, reached the fire, and the room was a roaring furnace. Allan saw the forms of his enemies silhouetted against the blaze for a fleeting instant, then they were flaming statues. One only, Jung Sin, nearer than the rest, leaped for the window and escaped the first gush of flame. Allan pressed the trigger of his ray-gun. But no blue flash answered that pressure. The weapon's charge had leaked out, was gone!

Allan tore himself loose from yellow hands that clutched at him, his fist crashed into Jung Sin's fear twisted visage, and the crazed Oriental fell back into the roaring blaze.

But Allan himself was thrust backward by that blow, was swaying on the very edge of the chasm. His hand went out for a saving hold on the window sash; flame licked at it. He was toppling, against the strain of his body muscles to resist the inevitable fall, and death reached up from depths for him. Then an arm was around him, was drawing him back to life. Naomi had darted back, defying the terror of that height, the surge of heat. She had reached him just in time—a split-second later and his weight would have been too much for her puny strength. But in this instant, the merest touch was enough to save him. They crept along the ledge and climbed wearily in.

There was another plane in the hangar, and presently Allan had it rising through the well into clean, free air. He turned to the girl in the seat beside him and pointed at the scene they were leaving.

"Look," he said.

The city was in darkness beneath them, save for the one staring rectangle that marked a pyre. But dawn shimmered opalescent in the east.

A soft white hand crept into Allan's. There was a long moment of silence. Then Allan said, softly: "A new day, and a new world for their children."

A sleepy, tired voice sighed: "For their children and ours, Allan."

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